



Readers' Guide

The Ones Who Remember: Second-Generation Voices of the Holocaust

Edited by

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INTRODUCTION

This Reader's Guide was developed for use in book groups and for reflection by individual readers who are high school age or older. The questions are intended as conversation starters for anyone interested in the Holocaust and its impact on future generations.

Any one of the listed questions may be selected as a beginning point for discussion or exploration of this book, depending on a reader's or book group leader's interest. Most of the questions relate to various themes that are represented in many of the authors' narratives. In these instances, we have included references to specific authors' chapters as illustrative examples.

For readers who are less familiar with the Holocaust or Jewish traditions and terms, a glossary is offered after this list of questions. To request a fuller glossary, including links to additional resources, please email genafter@gmail.com.

If you or your book club would like to discuss anything further with our authors or invite them to be a part of a group discussion or community event, please fill out the form on the [Contact](#) page of our website.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Which authors' stories most resonated with or touched you? And why?
2. What surprised you about the authors' stories of the impact of the Holocaust in their lives? What did you learn that was new to you about the Holocaust, the survivors and/or the second generation?
3. Phil Barr, in his chapter "Cutting Corners" and Fran Lewy Berg, in her chapter "Osmosis," are two examples of authors whose survivor parents could not or would not share details of their Holocaust experiences. Ruth Wade, in her chapter, "Not Made of Glass," did not learn the full story of her father's past until she was in her thirties. Other authors report learning only fragments of their families' tragic history over time as they were growing up.
 - In what ways were these and other authors impacted by their parents' secrecy?
 - What do you believe is a family's obligation to share their personal history of trauma with their children?
4. Several authors describe complicated relationships with their parents. Many struggled with how to separate from their parents and strike their own path. In the chapter "Memorize This Address," Ava Adler discovers she is not responsible for her mother's happiness. In her chapter, "One Day the World Will Be the World Again," Joy Wolfe Ensor navigates independence from her role as a physical and emotional support for her mother while maintaining a strong and loving relationship with her.
 - Do you think the issues of separation and individuation and the resulting conflicts that occurred in families of the Holocaust are any different than what would be experienced as "normal" tension in any "typical" family?

- What responsibility did you see that these or other second-generation authors felt to make their parents' dreams come alive? Do you think this occurred more frequently for these families because of this trauma?
5. Concern over adding to their parents' suffering was a common issue reflected in these authors' narratives. Ruth Taubman, in her chapter "Screams in the Night," says "...my worst day was a pimple compared to what my mother had experienced." Julie Ellis, in her chapter "The Attic Full of Photographs," shares the emotional toll of her reluctance to inflict more pain into her parents' lives.
- What effects did you see in these and the other authors' stories of the suppression of their own suffering?
 - What personality traits, if any, did you find that these authors had in common with each other more than with others who did not reveal this tendency?
6. In each of the book chapters, the authors reflect both on their own mental anguish as well as on that of their survivor parents. For example, in her chapter, "Shades of Chanel No.5," Rita Benn reflects on her fears of her mother's reliance on anti-anxiety medication and perceptions of her mother's vulnerability. Avishay Hayut, in his chapter "Drinking from a Half-Full Broken Glass," describes his concerns over his mother's fragility and mental instability and his own struggle with mental health.
- What impact did you see of the survivors' mental suffering on the lives of the second generation?
 - In what ways do you think this emotional suffering or more generally the Holocaust legacy influenced the authors' choices to pursue careers in the healing professions?
 - Do you think the prevalence and experience of mental health issues described in the authors' stories is very different from

what occurs in the general population? What makes you think this way?

7. A predominant theme amongst the authors was the admiration of their parents' strength and resilience. For example, Eszter Gombosi, in her chapter "If Only," speaks of her mother's remarkable drive to learn, pursuing two degrees and then shifting mid-life to a different career path. Natalie Iglewicz named her chapter "Lessons from My Parents," to honor the ways they taught her kindness, generosity, and the importance of family and community. And in the chapter "Osmosis," Fran Lewy Berg talks about what she inherited from her parents: "When it comes to resilience, to perseverance, to accomplishment, to loving, I am my parents' daughter."
 - In what ways do you believe that the experience of suffering in one's own life encourages the development of resilience or kindness to others?
 - Do you think that such traits as resilience, achievement motivation or kindness are transmitted epigenetically?

8. Some authors were fortunate enough to have aunts or grandmothers who played pivotal roles in their lives. For example, Nancy Szabo, in her chapter "I Don't Remember," illustrates how supportive her paternal grandmother was to her, particularly at a very vulnerable time. Simone Yehuda, in her chapter "Chesed," warmly remembers the image of her French grandmother "braid(ing) radiant silk bows in her hair." Joy Wolfe Ensor, in her chapter "One Day the World Will Be the World Again," speaks of the profound influence of and relationship with her mother's sister. Other authors speak of the profound loss of extended family.
 - What influence did you see that the Holocaust had on the quality of the relationships between the second-generation authors and

their immediate living relatives (grandmothers, aunts or uncles, cousins)?

- In what ways did the absence of salient family relations resulting from their murder in the Holocaust affect the authors' relationships with their own children and extended family?

9. The words of our parents or grandparents often stay with us and frame how we approach life. For example, in her chapter "Memorize This Address," Ava Adler describes a personal motto that came out of her family's experience and shaped how she viewed life: "Hope for the best...plan for the worst."

- What other mottos did you see in the authors' stories that seemed to shape their perception of life or the way they raised their children?
- What phrase from your childhood do you remember that affected how you felt about the world or approached situations?
- If you were to come up with a motto that grew out of your family background to characterize your approach to life, what might it be?

10. In the Jewish tradition, children are often named in memory of family members who have passed away. Many of the second-generation authors describe disparate meanings to their namesakes. For example, Julie Ellis, in her chapter "The Attic Full of Photographs," Rita Benn, in her chapter "Shades of Chanel No. 5," and Natalie Iglewicz, in her chapter "Lessons from My Parents," share the unique impact of this naming in their lives.

- In what ways do you think naming a child after a family member who was murdered in the Holocaust is both a burden and an honor?
- What other examples of legacy transmission do you see in the authors' narratives?

- How has your given name influenced your direction or approach to life?

11. The experience of the Holocaust resulted in some survivor families abandoning known Jewish traditions and in others strongly embracing their religion and culture. For example, in her chapter “Generation to Generation,” Sassa Åkervall describes how she connected with her Jewish identity as a teenager. In Nancy Szabo’s chapter “I Don’t Remember,” she and her father both become B’nai Mitzvah as adults and describes that she always knew that she would raise her children in the Jewish tradition.

- What was most unexpected to you about the influence of the Holocaust on the meaning of Judaism in these authors’ families?
- Why do you think Judaism took a more significant hold in some of the second-generation families when raising their own children?
- How important is your own religion when it comes (or will come) to encouraging its adherence in your own children or grandchildren?

12. Many of the second-generation authors describe themselves as feeling different from others as they were growing up – of not belonging. For example, in her chapter “Always an Outsider,” Cilla Tomas says, “I didn’t feel comfortable in my own skin and saw myself as an outsider...even in the Jewish community where most of the members hadn’t been directly affected by the Holocaust.”

- In what ways do you think that this felt sense of being different or not belonging is a universal human experience? And why?
- Do you think that this perception is more typical among those who are not part of the majority culture and/or who experience severe trauma in their family history?

- “Welcoming the stranger” is a deeply held value in many faith traditions. What actions do you think we could take to help everyone feel they are part of one humanity? Where and how would you begin?

13. The enormity of the Holocaust trauma is expressed in all the second-generation author stories. Ruth Taubman, in her chapter “Screams in the Night,” says, “no amount of trouble can equal the monolith that is the Holocaust.” Phil Barr, in his chapter “Cutting Corners,” talks about the Holocaust as his “black well of emotion.” A few authors talk about the Holocaust trauma in their DNA.

- What universal impact do you see in the transmission of Holocaust trauma from the survivor parents to these second-generation families?
- How did you see the Holocaust experience affecting the authors’ capacity to parent their own children?
- Do you believe in the epigenetic transmission of the impact of trauma?

14. Four authors in this anthology grew up outside North America and moved to the United States as adults. Eszter Gombosi, in her chapter “If Only,” describes being raised under a communist regime in Hungary. Sassa Åkervall and Cilla Tomas, in their respective chapters, “Generation to Generation” and “Always an Outsider,” describe their family lives in Europe, and Avishay Hayut, in his chapter “Drinking from a Half-Full Broken Glass,” grew up in Israel.

- In what ways do you think that the political context of where these authors were raised affected their lived experience of Holocaust trauma?
- How did you see that the trauma of the Holocaust on these authors is different or like that described by the other authors raised in North America?

- Irrespective of their country of origin, the family backgrounds of the authors varied in terms of their parents' marital status, education, career, and material success. What do you think is the relative influence of the Holocaust trauma and these family background factors in shaping the second-generation authors' life paths?

15. Several authors write about moments of grace in healing their relationships with their parents and themselves. For example, in her chapter "Chesed," Simone Yehuda finds "...it's love, and love alone—chesed, loving kindness—that can heal the wounds of soul murder." In Ruth Wade's chapter "Not Made of Glass," she reflects on how she came to forgive her father for his shortcomings.

- Where else did you see moments of grace and healing in these and the other authors' stories?
- What did you see either in the author's actions or their life events that preceded or facilitated their paths into healing?
- What do you think is the role of aging in promoting healing from this trauma or trauma of any sorts?

16. Forgiveness of the Nazis and their collaborators is an ongoing struggle for many in the second generation. Myra Fox, in her chapter "Please Remember," wrote, "...without bitterness, I believe resolutely: there is no forgiveness for acts of genocide. There is no forgiveness for the Holocaust."

- What do you see as the cost to the second generation in their struggle to forgive the Germans and their collaborators?
- How do you see this issue of forgiveness of our own country given their role in the Holocaust and what we are learning about regarding the past (and some would argue ongoing) treatment of African Americans, Native Americans, Japanese Americans, and other minorities?

- Do you believe that this trauma will continue to be passed on through the generations without forgiveness or a process for truth and reconciliation?

17. Several authors share a concern of the rising tolerance of white supremacy and antisemitism in our country and European nations. For example, Ava Adler, in her chapter “Memorize this Address,” writes, “I am really fearful of the echoes of Nazi Germany reverberating.”

- Do you think a family history of the Holocaust exaggerates the level of safety and security in the world that was felt by those in the second generation?
- What do you believe or know about the increasing incidence of hate crimes against the Jews in this country and worldwide?
- What do you see as your responsibility to stand up for injustice that occurs to others?

18. Why do you think the Holocaust legacy is so important to the second generation?

- What impact do you think the stories of the survivors and the second generation had or will have on the third generation?
- How might these authors’ stories or more broadly speaking, education on the Holocaust, help bring forth a greater compassion and empathy in our nation’s children?
- What individual or collection actions do you think can be taken to ensure that a Holocaust is never again repeated?

GLOSSARY

Aktion. The mass assembly, deportation, and murder of Jews by the Nazis during the Holocaust.

Aliyah (Hebrew, "going up"). Immigration to Israel.

Auschwitz/Birkenau. A Nazi forced labor/extermination camp about 35 miles west of Kraków, Poland. Of the 1.1 million people who died there, at least 90% were Jews.

Avinu Malkeinu (Hebrew: "Our Father, our King"). A traditional Rosh Hashanah prayer.

Bima. A platform in a synagogue at which services and Torah readings are led.

B'nai Mitzvah (plural for *Bar* or *Bat Mitzvah*; Hebrew: "children of the commandments"). A religious coming-of-age ceremony, typically around age 13, in which a Jewish young person is considered an adult for the purpose of Jewish observance.

Bubbe, bubbie, bubby. Affectionate Yiddish term for Grandma.

Chacha. From the Polish word *ciocia*, meaning "aunt."

Concentration camps. An extensive system of Nazi-run prison, forced labor, transit and extermination camps.

Death march. Initiated in January 1945, forced evacuations of Nazi concentration camp inmates, often to keep Nazis and their prisoners from falling into Allied hands.

Dem Aleph Bais. The alphabet song, in Yiddish.

Displaced Persons (DP) camp. Communities organized in post-war Europe to house Holocaust survivors who could neither return to their homelands nor immigrate.

Eichmann, Adolf. A major architect of the “Final Solution,” who arranged the mass deportation of Jews to ghettos and extermination camps during the Holocaust.

Epigenetics (from the Greek “*epi-*,” meaning “on top of”). The study of how environment and experience can affect the way a person’s genes work.

Forced labor, labor battalion. Prisoners forced by the Nazis into unpaid labor to support the German war effort. Many died of starvation, disease, and abuse.

Ghetto. Sealed-off sections of cities, mostly in Eastern Europe, where Jews from the surrounding areas were forced to live in overcrowded and squalid conditions.

Gymnasium (pr. *gim-NAH-zee-oom* with a hard “g”). An university-preparatory academic academy in some European countries.

Haggadah (Hebrew, “narration”). The book incorporating the liturgy of the Passover seder that recounts the Israelites’ exodus from Egypt.

Hashomer Hatzair. A Zionist youth movement founded in Eastern Europe.

Hasidism. An Orthodox spiritual/mystical movement, founded in 18th century Eastern Europe.

Holocaust. The state-sponsored systematic killing of six million Jews and millions of others during the Nazi era.

Iron Curtain (1945-1991). The Soviet Union’s physical and ideological barrier isolating itself and its satellite states from contact with the West and other noncommunist areas.

Joint Distribution Committee. A Jewish relief organization founded during World War I.

Kiddush Ha'Shem (Hebrew: "Sanctification of the Name"). A Jewish precept of sanctifying God's holy name through adhering to the Holiness Code.

Kinder Aktion. The SS's rounding up and killing of children in the ghettos.

Kristallnacht (German, "The Night of Broken Glass," Nov. 9-10, 1938). Anti-Jewish pogroms, destruction (the broken glass) and mass arrests in Germany and its territories.

L'dor v'dor. Hebrew for "from generation to generation."

Mengele, Josef. An SS physician at [Auschwitz](#) who "selected" new arrivals for life or death and conducted pseudo-medical experiments, especially on twins and Gypsies.

Partisans. Resistance fighters who conducted guerrilla warfare, often behind enemy lines, in Nazi-occupied countries.

Rozhinkes mit Mandlen. Yiddish lullaby, "Raisins and Almonds."

Seder. The Passover ritual meal. Its order (seder) involves a reading of the story of the Israelites' liberation from enslavement in Egypt (see Haggadah).

Selection. Euphemism for the Nazis' process of choosing those camp inmates deemed fit for slave labor from those sent to be murdered in the gas chambers.

Shiva (Hebrew, "seven"). A period of mourning after the death of a loved one, which begins on the day of burial and lasts for seven days.

Shoah (Biblical Hebrew, "catastrophe"). The Hebrew term for the Holocaust.

Sind Juden. German: "You are Jews."

SS (*Schutzstaffel*, German, "Protection Squads"). A state within a state in Nazi Germany, specifically charged with exterminating Europe's Jews.

Stolpersteine (German, "Stumbling stones"). A project of artist Gunter Demnig, commemorative brass plaques installed in front of Nazi victims' last address of choice.

Tikkun Olam (Hebrew, "world repair"). A phrase originating in rabbinic literature, now connoting human responsibility for seeking social justice and repairing the world.

Yizkor (Hebrew: "remember"). A traditional mourning service recited by those who have lost a parent or a close loved one.

Zaehl-Appel (German, "roll call"). Mandatory roll calls and counts – often hours long multiple times a day -- of all prisoners, living and dead, in front of each camp's barracks.